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Politics and People

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Dollars & Cents

Washington.

Senator Dodd's libel action against detractors offers the prospect, if pressed to a conclusion, of a useful course of public instruction in the mysteries of money in politics.

Reservations about the completion of such actions brought in political quarrels are always in order, this species of litigation having a pronounced tendency to fade into nothingness when the heat is off. At the moment, though, the senior Senator from Connecticut vows a purpose to go to the mat on the questions of how he got and what he did with great gobs of money over the last five years.

The basic issue is the use for other than direct campaign purposes of contributed and untaxed funds.

A jury in Chicago last year agreed that the expense of keeping up appearances constituted a valid use of money obtained under the heading of political contributions, as essential to continued political appeal. It acquitted a former Illinois governor, William G. Stratton (1952-1960) of evading taxes on \$83,000 that went into oil portraits of himself and his wife, European travels for his daughter, household furniture, clothing for daughter and wife, and building a vacation lodge, among other uses. A witness in support of the defense contention that an appearance of affluence is politically important was Senator Everett Dirksen, whose ruffled air would seem to less perceptive observers than the jurors to be a full negation of his testimony.

A national jury of voters gave its approval in effect in 1952 to the obscure reasons for an \$18,000 fund provided Senator Richard Nixon by 76 well-wishers which brought on a crisis in the presidential election year, a crisis resolved by Mr. Nixon's stirring appeal to his wife's plain cloth coat and his little dog, Checkers.

Under indictment in Detroit on charges of tax evasion is a former mayor of the city, Louis Miriani, and here too the defense involves asserted campaign contributions. The Government says that during four years as mayor at \$25,000 a year he accumulated \$220,000.

Even with this substantial sum at his command, Mayor Miriani was defeated as a candidate for reelection.

are as loose as everything else in the

creaky Corrupt Practices Act of 1925 which prohibits political spending. The law was drawn before the discovery of the \$100-a-plate political testimonial, which plowed a king-size path through its reporting provisions. Technically, a ticket is purchased rather than a donation given, and so there is no requirement for the listing of purchasers, who may have something in mind close to the fine line between a contribution and a bribe. Lobbyists and the like find this anonymity an admirable cover for undetected giving to rival candidates. Even the most hopeless of candidates benefit, some in odd ways. A recent "candidate" in Miami Beach who cheerfully acknowledges he entered with no intention of winning, accepted the proceeds of a campaign dinner and departed on a sumptuous vacation.

The snowy-haired Senator Dodd's legal action is directed in part against allegations that he wrongfully diverted to personal uses proceeds from a series of fund-raising dinners running to perhaps \$170,000 or \$200,000, without reporting the money as personal income.

An air of uneasiness in that connection is evident through, a large part of Congress. The expenses of political life go far beyond the amounts spent specifically in campaign activities.

Little is said about these, and no account taken of them by the struggling voter who hears with amazement his congressman complain that the \$30,000 congressional salary is a slave wage.

Wedding presents at quick glance appear at the far extreme from grubby political spending. They are in fact a substantial item and in many cases a drain on any person in elective office, merely as a means of maintaining goodwill. The officeholder can anticipate an invitation to daughter's wedding from any proud parent whose hand he has shaken and vote solicited in his constituency, the presence of a distinguished public official adding tone to the nuptials. A gift is a must, and no shopping at the dime store at peril of being forever branded a cheap-skate.

Only the independently wealthy can carry such burdens without assistance, however obtained. About one third of the 100 senators are regarded as in the independently wealthy category, fewer in the House of Representatives. Most of the others have anxieties about finances. The casual advice that the problem can be met easily by getting out of politics is hardly the solution. The successors would confront the same conditions.

It is a dilemma whose history is as long as that of the Republic. Daniel Webster demanded a political retainer from a bank for taking care of its interests. In 1907, the effect is pretty much the same.

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